



NEWS RELEASE

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**No change in eighth-graders' performance in U.S. history, geography, civics since 2010**  
***But Hispanic students' scores up in U.S. history, geography from 2010; overall increases seen since 1990s***

WASHINGTON — The overall academic performance of eighth-graders in U.S. history, geography and civics has remained unchanged since 2010, according to *The Nation's Report Card: 2014 U.S. History, Geography, and Civics*, though Hispanic students have made gains in U.S. history and geography. Compared with the first U.S. history assessment in 1994 and first civics assessment in 1998, overall average scores are higher — but in 2014, 3 percent or less scored at the *Advanced* level in any of the three subjects. Geography is the only subject of the three in which there has not been a change in overall scores since its first assessment in 1994.

The results are from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as The Nation's Report Card. NAEP reports performance using average scores and percentages of students performing at or above three achievement levels: *Basic*, *Proficient* and *Advanced*. The *Basic* level denotes partial mastery of the knowledge and skills needed for grade-appropriate work; *Proficient* denotes solid academic performance; and *Advanced* represents superior work.

The National Center for Education Statistics, which administers NAEP as a way to measure what American students know and can do in various subject areas over time, administered the three separate assessments to nationally representative samples of more than 29,000 eighth-graders in total across the country. Each assessment was given to a different group of eighth-grade students, and contained multiple-choice and constructed-response questions.

The 2014 results show that 27 percent of eighth-grade students performed at or above *Proficient* in geography, 23 percent scored at or above *Proficient* in civics and only 18 percent did so in U.S. history. Among those students, a small percentage — 3 percent or less — scored at the *Advanced* level in any subject.

"Geography, U.S. history and civics are core academic subjects that must be a priority. They represent knowledge and skills that are fundamental to a healthy democracy," said Terry Mazany, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees NAEP. "The lack of knowledge on the part of America's students is unacceptable, and the lack of growth must be addressed. As a country, we must do better."

The reports also include responses from eighth-graders about their experiences studying the three subjects. For example, students reported that they read material from a textbook less frequently, while listening to information presented online and using computers at school for social studies more frequently, in 2014 than in 2010.

"The way students are absorbing information is changing," said Chasidy White, an eighth-grade geography and history teacher in Brookwood, Ala., and a National Assessment Governing Board member. "Instruction needs to meet students where they are to improve learning. In my classroom, that means embracing technology and incorporating discussions about current events. I encourage all teachers to use these reports to spark new ideas for their classroom practices."

One of the bright spots in these reports is the increase in performance among Hispanic students, whose scores in 2014 across all three subjects are higher than the scores seen in each subject's first assessment year. White students are the only other racial/ethnic group with this improvement trend.

The Governing Board plans to have the U.S. history, geography and civics assessments administered to eighth- and 12th-grade students next in 2018. For the first time, these three assessments will be entirely computer-based — a model by which all NAEP assessments will be administered. Highlights from each subject are below:

**U.S. history** – This assessment asked questions in four themes: democracy, culture, technology and world role. For example, a democracy-themed question asks students to identify the effect of a Supreme Court case:

The Supreme Court's 1803 decision in *Marbury v. Madison* established the court's power to:

- A. Impeach a president
- B. Decide whether a federal law is constitutional
- C. Resolve conflicts between states
- D. Resolve conflicts between the president and Congress

The correct answer is B, which 41 percent of students selected.

- Both male and female Hispanic students have made gains since 2010. The average score for female Hispanic students is up 4 points; male Hispanic students scored 5 points higher.
- Scores are higher in all themes except technology since 1994. In the context of the U.S. history assessment, technology focuses on the transformation of the American economy from rural frontier to industrial superpower and its impact on society, ideas and the environment.
- A score gap between male and female students did not exist in 1994; however, it did exist in 2014, with male students scoring 4 points higher than female students.

**Geography** – Questions on this assessment measured students' knowledge in space and place; environment and society; and spatial dynamics and connections. For example, an environment and society-themed question asked students to use a map to explain the impact of ocean currents on a continent:

The Brazil and the Peru currents affect the climate of South America. Explain what effect each of these currents has on the temperature and rainfall of their adjacent land areas.

Seven percent of students received the highest-score rating of "Complete."

- Since 1994, lower-performing students have made gains, resulting in 4 percent fewer students below the *Basic* category and 5 percent more at the *Basic* level.
- Since 1994, score gains for black and Hispanic students (11 and 10 points, respectively) have been larger than those for white students (4 points).
- Since 2010, Hispanic students have made a 4-point gain; however, their achievement gap with white students did not change significantly.
- There has been no statistically significant change in the gender gap since the assessment began in 1994.

**Civics** – Students were asked about civic life, politics and government; the foundations of the American political system; government embodiment of American democracy; the relationship of the U.S. with other nations; and the roles of citizens. For example, a short-answer civics question about world affairs asked students to explain the benefits of international interactions as they relate to trade, treaties and agreements, and humanitarian aid. In 2014, 62 percent of eighth-graders' responses were rated as "Complete."

- Hispanic students' scores have increased since 1998, narrowing the achievement gap with white students by 8 points.
- Although there have been gains among lower-performing students since 1998, with a higher percentage of students scoring at *Basic* and a lower portion below *Basic*, there has been no change in the percentage of students overall scoring at or above the *Proficient* level since 1998.
- The scores of black male students have increased by 6 points since 1998.
- Civics is the only subject without a significant gender gap: The 4-point gap between male and female students in 1998 has closed.

The full set of data is available through the interactive reports, in which, for example, users can view scores in all subjects by racial/ethnic group in the context of other variables such as parental education, school location or gender; or, as another example, compare the performance of Hispanic students whose parents graduated from high school to Hispanic students whose parents graduated from college. For more information, visit [www.nagb.org/2014-history-geo-civics](http://www.nagb.org/2014-history-geo-civics).

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*The National Assessment of Educational Progress is a continuing and nationally representative measure of trends in academic achievement of U.S. elementary and secondary students in various subjects. Since 1969, NAEP assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and other subjects at grades 4, 8, and 12. Through The Nation's Report Card, NAEP informs the public about what American students know and can do in various subject areas and compares achievement among states, large urban districts, and various student demographic groups. NAEP is a congressionally authorized project of the National Center for Education Statistics within the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education. The Commissioner of Education Statistics is responsible for carrying out the NAEP project. The National Assessment Governing Board oversees and sets policy for NAEP.*

*The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, nonpartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public. Congress created the 26-member Governing Board in 1988 to oversee and set policy for NAEP.*